

A STUDY ON THE VISITORS IN CORBETT TIGER RESERVE:

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an impetus for the socio-economic development of developing countries like India. It is the largest and fastest growing civilian industry that employs the maximum number of persons, both directly and indirectly. India attracts 17 million foreigners each year, generating more than US \$100 billion in revenues (Travel Operators for Tiger). Corbett Tiger Reserve is one of the oldest protected areas in India and was established in 1936 as Hailey National Park to protect the endangered Bengal tiger. Tourism in Corbett Tiger Reserve has earned a local sense of pride and has led to the promotion of regional development. In recent years, the number of people coming here has increased dramatically. Presently, every year more than 1, 00, 000 visitors come to the reserve from India and other countries. Keeping in mind the importance of tourism, it seems necessary to know the socio-economic characteristics of the visitors in the reserve and the problems faced by them. This study has been conducted with the specific objectives: 1) to study the socio-economic profile of the visitors 2) to study the constraints faced by the visitors. This paper focuses on studying the socio-economic profile of both Indian and foreign visitors and identifying their problems during their visit. The data used in the study is based on a sample of 120 visitors of the reserve. Findings of the study suggest policy recommendations and action plans for the encouragement of tourism and improvement of the facilities provided by the reserve. The findings of the study are important for the policy makers and relevant agencies.

KEYWORDS: Tourists, Socio-Economic Profile, Tourist's Constraints, Tiger Reserve

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the movement of people from one place to another for leisure and has now grown to such dimensions and importance that it has become the largest industry in the world. India rank fifth among countries with the fastest growing tourism industry. It is the sector which has a high multiplier effect of 3.2 – i.e. for every rupee invested in building the infrastructure, the revenue generated is more than three times (Singh, 1996). The tourism industry is the third highest foreign exchange earner in India. The World Travel and Tourism Council calculated that tourism generated \$121 billion or 6.4% of the nation's GDP in 2011. It is responsible for 39.3 million jobs, 7.9% of its total employment. The GDP of the tourism sector has expanded 229% between 1990 and 2011. The sector is predicted to grow at an average annual rate of 7.7% in the next decade (Arunmozhi and Panneerselvam, 2013). Analyzing the potential in tourism sector, the National Tourism Policy was reformulated in 2002 by the Government of India. The policy attempts to ensure that the tourist to India gets physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched, spiritually elevated and “feel India from within”

One of the objectives of the establishing National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries is to provide opportunities to the citizens to view wild animals in their natural environment. The number of tourists seeking this kind of wilderness experience is on an increase all over the world. Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) because of its unique landscape and wildlife is one of the priority areas in the list of both Indian and Foreign tourists. In CTR, visitors are able to see beautiful landscapes and a number of birds and wild animals within a short period.

Tourism in CTR has earned a local sense of pride and has led to the promotion of regional development including that of infrastructure. In recent years the number of people coming here has increased dramatically. Presently, every year more than 1, 00, 000 visitors come to the park from India and other countries. To promote tourism in Corbett Tiger Reserve, there is a need to understand the tourist group both Indian and foreigners i.e. their socio-economic profile and the constraints they face during their visits to the reserve.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Corbett Tiger Reserve of Uttarakhand, India. A sample of 120 visitors (113 Indian and 7 foreigners) was taken randomly for the present study. The ratio of Indian to foreign visitors in the sample was as per the average ratio in past 10 years which was found to be 16:1. The present study is based on primary data. A questionnaire was taken to study the socio economic profile of visitors and constraints faced by them. The required primary data were collected from selected visitors by giving questionnaire in the period ranged from March to May, 2012. The questionnaire was handed over to the visitors on the basis of one sample from one family/group for gathering data.

The socio-economic variables like age, gender, family size, nationality, household income, their educational status and occupation possessed by the visitor were analyzed using simple descriptive tools like averages and percentages, ratios etc. To study the constraints faced by the visitors during their visit in the reserve was examined by using simple descriptive statistics i.e. percentage. The percentage of visitors for each constraint was calculated which gave an idea about the severity of the constraints. On the basis of percentage, reported constraints were ranked. The constraints were studied separately for Indian and foreign visitors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Under socio-economic aspects age, gender, nationality, household size and its composition, membership of animal right or environmental organization, educational profile, occupation, household income, earning members in a household and information seeking behavior were assessed.

- **Age of Sample Visitors**

It was found that most of the visitors i.e. 42.5 per cent were of age group up to 30 years. There were only 26.67 per cent of the sample visitors and 15.83 per cent visitors who belonged to the age group of 30-40 years and 40-50 years, respectively. The average age of the visitors in Corbett Tiger Reserve was observed around 36 years. The age of visitors ranged from 16 years to 72 years.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to Age Group

S. No.	Age Group (Years)	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Up to 30	51	42.50
2.	30-40	32	26.67
3.	40-50	19	15.83

Table 1: Contd.,			
4.	Above 50	18	15.00
	Total	120	100.00

Gender Characteristic of Sample Visitors

Table 2 represents the gender of the sample visitors. The distribution of the visitors based on gender showed that out of total 120 sample visitors, 77.5 per cent were males and 22.5 per cent were females.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to Gender

S. No.	Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Male	93	77.50
2.	Female	27	22.50
	Total	120	100.00

The results may seem like the sample is skewed towards males, but sometimes when the questionnaires were handed out to a family or a group it was filled by the guardian of that group who are generally males.

Nationality of Sample Visitors

Table 3 reveals the nationality of sample visitors. Out of total 120 sample visitors, 113 were Indians i.e. 94.17 per cent and rest 7 i.e. 5.83 per cent were Foreigners.

Table 3: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to Nationality

S. No.	Nationality	No. of Visitors (2010-11)	Percentage of Visitors	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1.	Indian	1,82,019	95.91	113	94.17
2.	Foreigner	7774	4.09	07	5.83
	Total	1,89,793	100.00	120	100.00

During the year 2010-11, Corbett Tiger Reserve had 1, 89, 793 visitors, out of which 7774 (4.09 percent) were foreigners. Thus, it can be said that when comparing the sample results of the visitors' nationality to the population there was no significant difference.

Household Size of Sample Visitors

Table 4 shows the family structure of sample visitors. The overall picture of family composition shows that the average size of family was of 3.71 members.

Table 4: Composition of Household of Sample Visitors

S. No.	Particulars	Average Size	Percentage
1.	Adult	2.84	76.55
2.	Children	0.86	23.13
3.	Household	3.71	100

The percentage of adults and children in the average size of family was 76.55 per cent and 23.13 per cent respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that on an average the household size of the visitors were about four members. Figure 5.1.4 represents the composition of the household of more clearly.

Membership of any animal right or environmental organization by any household member of the Sample Visitors

Table 5 reveals the number of households having the membership of animal right or environmental organization. It was found that only 10.83 per cent of the visitors had members of environmental or animal right organizations in their family.

Table 5: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to the Membership of Animal Right or Environmental Organization

S. No.	Membership	No. of Visitors	Percentage
1.	Yes	13	10.83
2.	No	107	89.17
	Total	120	100.00

The percentage of membership holder was low which shows that visitors had their own interest in visiting the reserve and their visit was not the result of influence of the member of their household having membership of environmental or animal right organization. Figure 5.1.5 also depicts the same in the graphical form.

Occupational Pattern of Sample Visitors

It is evident from the table 6 that maximum respondents (55.83 per cent) belonged to service sector followed by self employed (25 per cent) and others (19.17 per cent).

Table 6: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to Occupational Pattern

S. No.	Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Self employed	30	25.00
2.	Service	67	55.83
3.	Others	23	19.17
	Total	120	100.00

The maximum visitors were found to be from service sectors which may be due to the fact that the service sector has fixed number of holidays per year. This helped them to plan their visits according to the holidays of other family members. In contrast, self employed people have no such fixed holidays and it found to be difficult for them to plan any excursion. This result revealed that the occupation have had effect on the number of visits of the visitors.

Educational Profile of Sample Visitors

Table 7 represents the educational status of sample visitors. The distribution of literate respondents according to their formal level of education was found as intermediate (5.84 per cent), graduate (50.83 per cent) and post graduate & above (43.33 per cent), respectively. It was found that the minimum qualification of the sample visitors was intermediate.

Table 7: Distribution of Sample Visitors according to Educational Qualification

S. No.	Categories	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Intermediate	7	5.84
2.	Graduate	61	50.83
3.	Post graduate & above	52	43.33
	Total	120	100.00

Hence, it can be concluded that a substantial portion of the visitors were highly qualified and the literate people were found to have more willingness to plan nature visits.

- **Household Monthly Income of Sample Visitors**

It is obvious from Table 8 that most (46.67 per cent) of the respondents were from those families whose monthly household income were found in the category of Rs. 25,001 to Rs. 50,000 followed by other categories viz., 17.5 per cent (above Rs. 25,000); 16.67 per cent (Rs. 50,001 to Rs. 75,000); 10.83 per cent (Rs. 75,001 to Rs. 1,00,000); 5.83 per cent (above Rs.1,25,001) and 2.50 per cent (Rs. 1,00,001 to Rs.1,25,001).

Table 8: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to Household Monthly Income

S. No.	Household Monthly Income(Rs.)	No. of Respondent	Percentage
1.	Upto 25,000	21	17.50
2.	25,001-50,000	56	46.67
3.	50,001-75,000	20	16.67
4.	75,001-1,00,000	13	10.83
5.	1,00,001-1,25,000	3	2.50
6.	Above 1,25,001	7	5.83
	Total	120	100.00

The average household monthly income of the sample visitors was found to be Rs. 58,673.73. This information was gathered to analyze the variation in the household income. It is depicted in table 1.8 that only 10 households had their monthly income more than Rs. 1, 00, 000.

Information Seeking Behavior of Sample Visitors

Here, information seeking behavior refers to the behavior of the visitors to gather information from different sources viz. friends, relatives, media etc. before planning their trip to Corbett.

Table 9: Distribution of Sample Visitors According to their Information seeking Behavior

S. No.	Categories	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Friends	64	55.33
2.	Relatives	38	31.67
3.	Media	14	11.67
4.	Others	4	3.33
	Total	120	100.00

It is revealed from the table that the visit of maximum visitors i.e. 55.33 per cent was influenced by their friends followed by relatives (31.67 per cent). This result shows that the media influenced visits were only 11.67 per cent which reveals that it was not the prominent source for gathering information regarding trip to Corbett.

Constraints Faced by the Visitors during their Visits

It was realized that the constraints of Indian visitors may be different from the foreigners. Therefore, problems encountered by the visitors were studied for both the groups separately. Table 2 shows the ranking of constraints faced by the visitors on the basis of their severity.

Table 10: Constraints Faced by the Visitors in Corbett Tiger Reserve

S. No.	Particulars	Indian Visitors		Foreign Visitors	
		Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank
1.	Mismanagement in booking	88.5 %	I	100%	I
2.	Public Transportation Network	76.99 %	II	100%	I
3.	Facilities at reception lobby	49.56 %	V	71.43%	III

Table 10: Contd.,					
4.	Lack of cooperation	-	-	57.14%	IV
5.	Lack of comfortable vehicles	65.49 %	IV	85.71%	II
6.	Commercialization	72.57 %	III	71.43%	III
7.	Lack of medical facilities	10.62 %	VI	28.57%	VI
8.	Sanitation problem	-	-	85.71%	II
9.	Food problem	-	-	42.86%	V

Constraints faced by the Foreign Visitors in Visiting Corbett Tiger Reserve

The foremost constraints that were complained by all the foreign visitors were management in booking and public transport. The mismanagement in booking is due to the presence of the provision of both online and offline booking which is the prime reason for confusion and chaos. As Ramnagar, nearest railway station from the reserve is not directly connected to a single major city in the country, the inconvenience to the visitors is quite obvious.

Poor sanitation condition and uncomfortable vehicle were ranked second as a substantial number of foreign visitors i.e. 85.71 per cent also complained of uncomfortable vehicles in the reserve and the poor to moderate sanitation conditions.

71.43 per cent of the total foreign visitors were discontented with the luxury provided in the reception lobbies and found long waits in these lobbies taxing. An equal number of foreign visitors also bemoaned excessive commercialization of the region. Lack of cooperation from the locals was reported as constraint by 57.44 per cent which may be attributed to the local population's unfamiliarity with the English language.

Unavailability of continental and Italian cuisine and the spicy Indian food were recurring complains by 42.86 percent of the visitors. Last but not the least 28.57 percent of foreign visitors expressed their displeasure over the medical facilities around the Corbett region.

Constraints Faced by the Indian Visitors in Visiting Corbett Tiger Reserve

Indian visitors expressed concerns similar to the foreign visitors, the apparent mismanagement of the offline and online booking and the ensuing chaos at the reception was a common complain. Like the foreign visitors, 76.99 per cent of domestic visitors also complained about the poor public transport system.

Commercialization was observed as third major constraint faced by the Indian visitors. The substantial group of Indian visitors i.e. 72.57 percent also felt that the hotel and resort tariffs were too high. The uncomfortable vehicles in the reserve and the uncongenial lobby at the reception were the problems reported by 65.49 percent and 49.56 percent of the visitors, respectively. Only a small group of visitors i.e. only 10.62 percent of total Indian visitors expressed disappointment over the medical facilities in the area.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, the socio-economic profile of the visitors in Corbett Tiger Reserve and the constraints faced by them were examined. These fall under the purview of policy formulation. The important policy implications that could be drawn from the findings of the study are as follows:

- **Adding Adventures Activities:** The results show that the major portion of the visitors is of the youth i.e. up to 30 years as they are adventure and fun loving group. Efforts can be made to attract more and more youth by adding

adventurous activities to the trip to Corbett.

- **Reasonable Charges:** The occupational profile shows that the maximum visitors were found to be from service sectors. Therefore, the services provided the reserve in their rest houses must be according to their needs and pocket.
- **Involvement of Media:** It was found that the role of media in bringing tourists to the reserve is not prominent. Therefore, there is need to involve media in advertising the site which will help in bringing more and more tourists to Corbett.
- **Improved Booking Procedure:** Mismanagement in booking due to the provision of both online and offline booking was found to be the major constraints faced by the visitors. The management of the reserve is required to fix the ratio of online to offline booking for the visits in the reserve and in that, major portion must be of online booking.
- **Linkages with Major Cities:** It was found that there is no direct linkage between the major cities of India and nearest railway station, Ramnagar from Corbett Tiger Reserve. Therefore, efforts are required to connect Ramnagar with major cities of the country directly.
- **Comfort:** The vehicles and the reception lobby was not found enough comfortable for people of every class. The vehicles and reception lobby are required to be more comfortable.
- **Availability of Medical Facilities:** The medical facilities are also needed to improve in the area around the reserve.

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